

TONGUES—ARE THEY FOR TODAY?

by
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AN INTRODUCTORY ILLUSTRATION AND APOLOGY

On March 7th of this year, David Wilkerson, a seasoned “prophet” from New York City, issued a warning that shook his readers: “An earth-shattering calamity is about to happen.... It will engulf the whole [New York City] megaplex, including areas of New Jersey and Connecticut. Major cities all across America will experience riots and blazing fires.” Though Wilkerson was able to give few details about this impending conflagration other than “I know it is not far off,” he was able to provide some advice for his readers, including “laying in store a thirty-day supply of non-perishable food, toiletries and other essentials.”²

Most of those who were aware of this “prophecy” reacted to it with more amusement than alarm, but a few bloggers responded to Wilkerson’s doomsaying remarks in an effort to calm the panicked naïve among their readership. It seems that the previously simple task of answering this kind of alarmism, however, has been rendered increasingly complex by an uptick in sympathy for prophecy and tongues in conservative evangelicalism today. Simple denunciation of such foolishness is apparently no longer acceptable in today’s “open but cautious” evangelical milieu.³ Instead it would seem that one is now obliged to give Wilkerson a hearing and remain cautiously open to the possibility that his prophecy might be accurate. John Piper, for instance, cautiously proposes that Wilkerson’s prophecy “does not resonate with my spirit.... God might have said this. But it doesn’t smell authentic to me.”⁴ Somehow, I am not reassured.

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²David Wilkerson, “An Urgent Message,” David Wilkerson Today [weblog], entry posted 7 March 2009, <http://davidwilkersonstoday.blogspot.com/2009/03/urgent-message.html> (accessed 9 March 2009).

³I borrow the designation “open but cautious” from Robert L. Saucy, “An Open but Cautious View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

⁴John Piper, “Testing David Wilkerson’s Prophecy,” Desiring God [weblog], entry posted 9 March 2009, http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1670_testing_david_wilkersons_prophecy (accessed 9 March 2009). Admittedly, this is only the first of two responses by Piper, but the fact that this is a response at all (let alone the first) is

The case for the cessationism of revelatory gifts has been, I believe, objectively convincing for years. Unfortunately, not all arguments that are objectively convincing prove subjectively persuasive, particularly when the only ground of persuasion acceptable to some subjects is experiential in nature. This is a problem that by its very nature no journal article can overcome. Nonetheless, changes within the continuationist community over the past two decades provide an occasion to revisit the issue of cessation, recasting yesterday's defenses with greater care and with different emphases. For instance, while B. B. Warfield effectively answered the crude and overtly unbiblical expression of miraculous gifts prevalent in his day,⁵ there is a growing notion that Warfield was speaking not to the refined expression of tongues in today's conservative evangelical milieu, but to something else. Even recent works such as John MacArthur's *Charismatic Chaos*⁶ speak most clearly to a raw and careless expression of miraculous gifts that differs considerably from the more biblically sensitive continuationism that is finding increasing approval in conservative evangelicalism today.⁷

A second reason to revisit this topic is the fact that this new breed of tongues-speaking and prophecy comes today from sources more theologically conservative and more academically credible than ever before. Dispensationalism, historically a stronghold of cessationism,⁸ has seen a spike in sympathy for tongues, especially in progressive dispensational quarters.⁹ This surge of sympathy for tongues is also seen in Reformed circles, likewise traditionally cessationist,¹⁰ both in the academy (e.g., Wayne Grudem and D. A. Carson) and in the pulpit (e.g., John Piper and C. J. Mahaney). This encroachment of continuationism, coupled with an increasing suppression of differences on "non-essential" doctrines in the interest of standing "together for the

telling.

⁵B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Scribner's, 1918).

⁶Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

⁷MacArthur himself seems to bear silent witness to this fact by his recent and frequent associations and platform-sharing with known continuationists.

⁸In addition to MacArthur, see, e.g., Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996); Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999).

⁹The aforementioned Saucy essay in *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* is representative here. See below for my explanatory hypothesis for this decline of cessationism among progressive dispensationalists.

¹⁰In addition to Warfield, see, e.g., Robert L. Reymond, *What About Continuing Revelations and Miracles in the Presbyterian Church Today?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977); Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1993); Anthony A. Hoekema, *What About Tongue-Speaking?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).

gospel,” has created a milieu ripe for the allowance, accommodation, and even embrace of tongues in conservative evangelicalism and even fundamentalism today.

Works defending cessationism continue to emerge, but even these seem to feel pressure not only to affirm the evangelical credentials of continuationists, but also to recognize the contribution of continuationism to evangelicalism and even to concede certain aspects of continuationism. Dan Wallace, for instance, introduces the book *Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit* with the forthright assertion, “I am a cessationist,” even a “hard-line” cessationist.¹¹ But he admits that in the crucible of personal trial, he was forced to “come to grips with the inadequacy of the Bible *alone* to handle life’s crises. I needed an existential relationship with God.”¹² He adds,

Through this experience I found that the Bible was not adequate. I needed God in a personal way—not as an object of my study, but as friend, guide, comforter. I needed an existential experience of the Holy One. Quite frankly, I found that the Bible was not the answer. I found the Scriptures to be helpful—even authoritatively helpful—as a guide. But without my feeling God, the Bible gave me little solace. In the midst of this “summer from hell,” I began to examine what had become of my faith. I found a longing to get closer to God, but found myself unable to do so through my normal means: exegesis, scripture reading, more exegesis. I believe that I had depersonalized God so much that when I really needed him I didn’t know how to relate. I looked for God, but found many community-wide restrictions in my cessationist environment.¹³

Wallace concludes, “I am increasingly convinced that although God does not communicate in a way that opposes the scriptures, he often communicates in a non-verbal manner to his children. ... To deny that God speaks verbally to us today apart from the scriptures is not to deny that he communicates to us apart from the scriptures.”¹⁴

In these words lies a third and final reason for pressing a defense of cessationism today, one that penetrates to the heart of my concern, namely, that the practice of tongues (and all revelatory gifts) is not so innocuous and peripheral to the *Kerygma* as is often portrayed. Allowance for tongues and continuing revelations from God (whether verbal or non-verbal) betrays a dim view of the sufficiency of Scripture alone to speak in all its grammatical/historical/theological simplicity to all of life.¹⁵ Once we concede that Scripture may or even must be

¹¹“The Uneasy Conscience of a Non-Charismatic Evangelical,” in *Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), p. 2.

¹²Ibid., p. 1.

¹³Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁵Sam Waldron suggests that highly subjective views of Spirit guidance among conservative evangelicals (reflected in phrases like “God told me,” “God directed me,” etc., and most starkly in the violent rejection, in many quarters, of Garry Friesen’s

supplemented by revelatory “communication,” we have in principle surrendered one of the most vital doctrines of evangelical Protestantism, viz., *sola scriptura*. And this doctrine is one that we dare not abandon.

The following, then, is a brief case for cessationism. More narrowly, it is a brief case for the cessationism of *tongues* (though the basic principles in this article extend to other miraculous gifts). It begins by defining several key terms and establishing a historical setting, and then offers some objective, exegetical/theological reasons why the doctrine of cessationism should be maintained.

SOME DEFINITIONS

The term *cessationism* in this article refers to the idea that all the miraculous gifts practiced by the early church have been suspended for the duration of the present age. This is not to say that God is prohibited from intervening in his universe in a miraculous manner today (though some cessationists argue such), but that the miraculous *gifts*, including tongues, have ceased in this age. Nor is it to say that God will never again bestow miraculous powers to his people—allowance is generally made here for their resumption at some point in the age to come.

The term *continuationism* in this article refers to any non-cessationist position—the view that at least some of the early gifts practiced in the early church are still to be practiced today. This is not to say that *all* the gifts necessarily continue today, that *all* believers must exhibit miraculous gifts, or that these gifts are *always* at the disposal of believers (though some continuationists will argue any or all of these three points).¹⁶ At the risk of over-simplification, the cessationist and continuationist positions are to be regarded, for the purposes of this presentation, as mutually exclusive and comprehensive categories.

The term *glossolalia*, it shall be further argued below, refers

objective, wisdom-based approach to guidance expressed in his *Decision-Making and the Will of God* has left them particularly vulnerable to revelatory tongues-speaking as promoted by charismatics: “One of the reasons charismatics have been so successful in promulgating their views among Evangelicals is because Evangelicals themselves have come to a place where they have very loose and subjective understandings of important passages of the Word of God.... There has been a real tendency to devotionalize and spiritualize the Bible in a way that was made to order and set a lot of people up, when a charismatic came with his views, to not see all that much difference between charismatic subjectivism and the prevailing evangelical subjectivism.” In short, Waldron suggests that acceptance of tongues, on a grass-roots level, can generally be traced to a hermeneutically-induced rejection of the doctrine of *sola scriptura* (“Tongues! Signs! Wonders! An Interview with Dr. Sam Waldron,” entry posted December 8, 2005, <http://www.challies.com/archives/interviews/tongues-signs-w.php>, accessed 12 March 2009).

¹⁶As such I include under this rubric the “Open but Cautious,” “Charismatic/Pentecostal,” and “Third Wave” views represented in the Counterpoints volume, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*

specifically to the supernatural practice of speaking in a genuine language that one has not acquired by natural means. Since some have expanded the definition of this term to include a variety of coded speech patterns and even incoherent gibberish devoid of any inherent linguistic meaning,¹⁷ a few have opted for the more precise term *xenoglossia*. I understand these terms to be synonymous.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One of the lesser arguments for cessationism is the virtual absence of tongues-speaking from the apostolic period until the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ While this absence is not absolute, most of the examples of glossolalia from this period are isolated, sectarian, generally quite mystical, and frequently heretical¹⁹—and modern-day continuationists themselves often hesitate to appeal to these as determinative.

The modern-day phenomenon of tongues-speaking has come in a series of three “waves.” The first, Pentecostalism, is the most theologically driven of the three. Sparked by two concurrent, late-nineteenth-century surges of interest, viz., eschatology (a time when, biblically, tongues will reemerge) and a less-than-completely-defined dispensational emphasis on the Spirit’s new work of Spirit baptism in the present era (which was often accompanied in the NT book of Acts by tongues-speaking), Pentecostalism broke free from the Dispensational-Keswick alliance near the turn of the last century and matured into full independence in the ensuing decades.²⁰ Emphasis on tongues-speaking in this first wave was on its role as a confirmation of Spirit baptism either (1) at salvation or, more often, (2) at a crisis event

¹⁷I have deliberately avoided using the adjective *ecstatic* in this definition, because the term *ecstatic* speaks to a person’s emotional state, not the content of his utterance. A person can be ecstatic and coherent or he can be ecstatic and incoherent. Ecstasy may influence what is uttered, but not in any determinative way. See Robert H. Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’ (N.E.B.),” *Journal of Theological Studies* 17 (October 1966): 299–307.

¹⁸I describe this as a “lesser” argument because it is, after all, an argument from silence—both logically and literally. Nonetheless, it seems to be a notable silence. If speaking in tongues, like the other gifts, is a gift bestowed sovereignly by the Spirit (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:11, 18; Heb 2:4), it would seem logical that these would continue. While it is possible for believers to seek specific gifts (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1, 39) and for believers to fail in the exercise of their gifts due to a lack of faith (Mark 9:28–29), God’s bestowal of gifts is not restricted by human faith, and one would expect them to continue unabated in the age for which they are appointed.

¹⁹See, e.g., Hoekema, *What About Tongue-Speaking?* ch. 1; Edgar, *Satisfied by the Spirit*, ch. 8.

²⁰The Azusa Street Revival, which began in 1906 and ran for about ten years, is often cited as the event around which Pentecostalism coalesced as an independent system of thought. For a detailing of the historical factors leading to the formation of Pentecostalism, see Donald W. Dayton, “The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1983), ch. 4.

subsequent to salvation that launched the believer's second "stage" of Christian commitment.

The second "wave" of tongues-speaking, Charismatism, is the least theologically driven of the three waves. Not properly an expression of any one theological system, Charismatism is more a spontaneous and spectacular way of doing worship. As such, Charismatism spread across both Protestant and Roman Catholic denominational lines. Charismatism began roughly around 1960 and has continued ever since.

The "third wave," a term coined in 1980 by Peter Wagner, represents something of a reining in of Charismatism, but should not be regarded as a return to Pentecostalism. While the third wave is far from monolithic, it is generally marked by (1) an abandonment of the baptism of the Spirit as a crisis event subsequent to conversion and (2) moderation with respect to the necessity and importance of glossolalia—like the rest of the gifts, the gift of tongues is selectively given and, in keeping with 1 Corinthians 14, is not even among the "greatest" of the gifts. The spectrum of theological commitment among third wave advocates is broad, but a significant percentage of these are deeply concerned that the practice of tongues be biblically governed.

AN ARGUMENT FOR CESSATIONISM

How, then, is this new, more careful continuationist to be answered? There are, after all, many descriptive texts in favor of tongues-speaking in the NT, and even prescriptive texts that detail the proper practice of tongues in the church. Could it be that the continuationist who allows his *experience* to skew his exegesis has a counterpart in the cessationist who allows *non-experience* (or perhaps better, his rationalism) to skew his exegesis?²¹ Those who argue thusly are not without some warrant, and the cessationist does well to hear them. The dismissal of glossolalia because it is not "normal" to our post-enlightenment sensibilities proves too much,²² and certainly cannot substitute for careful theological argumentation. This being said, however, I do believe that a careful theological argument for cessationism can be mustered.

The Quest for an Elusive Proof Text

Perhaps the easiest way to argue a point of theology or practice is to cite a concrete text or set of texts that unambiguously affirms the point to be made. Some, in fact, will accept nothing less than such a

²¹So, for instance, Craig Keener, *Gift & Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 13 *et passim*.

²²That is, taken to its logical end, such a posture argues against *all* Christian supernaturalism, and thrusts the cessationist into the dubious company of theological liberalism, past and present.

proof text. For cessationists in this category, 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 reigns as the end-all argument for cessationism. I do allow for the possibility that this passage argues for cessationism in the present age; however, I am also keenly aware that the two interpretations that argue thusly are minority positions that must compete with a formidable alternative interpretation that is held by the majority. To be specific, the point of cessation in this text, viz., the arrival of the “perfect” (v. 10)²³ may possibly be the completion of the canon²⁴ or the maturation of the church,²⁵ but more probably refers to the state of affairs that accompanies the revelation of Jesus Christ to the believer either at the point of physical death or at the Second Advent—a revelation that immediately renders all lesser forms of revelation unnecessary. This final view is the majority view among modern commentators and the virtually unanimous understanding of continuationists;²⁶ further, it is the preference of not a few cessationists.²⁷ The latter would argue that the revelatory gifts will *finally* cease at the revelation of Jesus Christ, but are presently in a state of suspension (as is the case in much of biblical history) due to theological factors other than the message of 1 Corinthians 13.

In short, despite the great furor that surrounds this passage, the argument for cessationism does not rise or fall on the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13 alone. Further, the formidable exegetical case against this “proof text” for cessationism virtually guarantees that this passage alone will not convince skeptics. So while I allow the possibility that this passage might argue for the cessationist position, I am convinced that the more prudent course of action for the cessationist is to pursue a more robustly exegetical-*theological* argument for cessationism. This

²³Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture citations in this article are drawn from the *New American Standard Bible*, updated ed. (1995).

²⁴So e.g., R. Bruce Compton, “1 Corinthians 13:8–13 and the Cessation of Miraculous Gifts,” *DBSJ* 9 (2004): 97–144; Merrill Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 138–45; Reymond, *What About Continuing Revelations and Miracles?* pp. 30–36; Myron J. Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13,” *BSac* 153 (July–September 1996): 344–56.

²⁵So, e.g., F. David Farnell, “When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?” *BSac* 150 (April–June 1993): 171–202; Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), pp. 77–84; Donald G. McDougall, “Cessationism in 1 Cor 13:8–12,” *TMSJ* 14 (Fall 2003): 207–13.

²⁶So D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 66–76; Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 2000), pp. 227–52 *et passim*; Keener, *Gift & Giver*, pp. 105–7; Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 207–8.

²⁷See, e.g., Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 243–46; Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, pp. 109–12; Stanley D. Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question,” *BSac* 120 (October–December 1963): 311–16; R. Fowler White, “Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10: A Comparison of Cessationist and Noncessationist Argumentation,” *JETS* 35 (June 1992): 173–81.

concession will no doubt scandalize some, but broad appeal to the analogy of faith instead of a single text does not, in my opinion, weaken the cessationist argument; instead, it deepens and strengthens it.

The Argument from the Nature of Tongues as “Signs of an Apostle”

One of the foremost gifts given to the early church was the gift of apostleship—a gift that takes pride of place on at least two NT gift lists (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28). The priority of apostleship is primarily *temporal* in nature, but there also seems to be a suggestion that this gift carries with it a broader scope of responsibility and authority than any of the other gifts. Specifically to our discussion, apostles are described in 2 Corinthians 12:12 as arbiters of the miraculous gifts (viz., signs, wonders, and miracles) such that these are denominated “signs of a true apostle.” If this designation is to have any meaning at all, it follows that we should not regard miraculous gifts (including tongues) as the property of all believers or of believers in every era. These are not signs of a true *believer*, but signs of a true *apostle*—phenomena exercised “by virtue of the presence and activity of the apostles...under an ‘apostolic umbrella,’ so to speak.”²⁸

This being the case, the obvious follow-up question is whether the gift of apostleship continues today, a question that is increasingly answered in the negative today, even by continuationists. An apostle, by definition, is one who has been “given the legal power to represent another” so as to be “as the man himself,”²⁹ an astonishing authority that the early church regarded with extreme sobriety. In keeping with the practice of the period, apostleship could only be awarded directly by the one whom the apostle represented—in this case, Christ himself. Great emphasis is placed on Christ’s appointment of the apostles (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:12; Acts 1:2; 10:41); even Paul, the “untimely born” apostle (1 Cor 15:8), was insistent that his apostleship could not have been had by any indirect agency (Gal 1:1).³⁰ When the disciples

²⁸Richard B. Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* p. 39. Gaffin rejects Warfield’s understanding that miraculous gifts were exercised only by those upon whom the apostles personally laid hands as too “mechanical.” The extent of the exercise of tongues in the NT (and especially as described at Corinth) seems to bear out Gaffin’s broader understanding. See Acts 2:43; 8:18.

²⁹Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, 2nd rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1988), p. 14.

³⁰Replying to the objection that Christ did not appoint Matthias to the office of apostle, two possible answers emerge: (1) some suggest that his appointment was not sanctioned by Christ and thus illegitimate (i.e., Matthias was not really an apostle); but more likely, (2) Christ instructed the eleven to appoint a replacement and then confirmed that appointment directly by lot (Acts 1:26). In this case Christ did not *directly* appoint Matthias to his apostolate, but was intimately involved in the selection process.

sought to replace Judas as apostle, they expressed a compulsion to find someone who was an actual eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21–22), a qualification that, again, Paul regarded as absolutely essential to apostleship (1 Cor 9:1; 15:7–9).³¹ In order even to be eligible for apostleship, it would thus seem, one must have had literal contact with Christ during his earthly ministry, both seeing and hearing Christ physically. This understanding, which expressly limits the apostolic office to the first century, is furthered by the fact that the apostolic office, together with the prophetic office, is regarded as *foundational* of the church (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14).

In view of these exegetical considerations, the trend among more cautious continuationists today is to concede that the apostolic office no longer exists.³² This is a welcome reflection of fidelity to Scripture that we should celebrate. It raises, however, a theological corollary that cessationists do well to pursue, for as Waldron incisively notes, “The admission that the apostolate has ceased is a fatal crack in the foundation of Continuationism.”³³ Note the following:

- The admission that apostolism has ceased is *de facto* an admission that spiritual giftedness in the church today differs from spiritual giftedness in the early church. At least one (and potentially more) of the gifts possessed then are not possessed today.
- The admission that apostolism has ceased also seems to lead necessarily to the admission that the “signs of an apostle” must likewise have ceased—that is, unless one can find some new biblical basis and foundation for these gifts.³⁴
- The admission that apostolism has ceased, finally, militates

³¹One might even argue from 1 Cor 15:8 that Paul considered himself to be not only the *least* but also the *last* of the apostles. The fact that he was the last to see Christ, and one who received his apostleship “abnormally” (NIV) strongly suggests that there are no other apostles.

³²See, e.g., Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 906, 911; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 91, 156; Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, pp. 191–92. Exceptions to this general rule exist within the conservative evangelical world, most notably Sovereign Grace Ministries, over which C. J. Mahaney presides (see <http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/ChurchPlanting/ApostolicCare.aspx>), but they are relatively rare.

³³Waldron, *To Be Continued?* p. 23. This point represents Waldron’s thesis and the starting point from which all his arguments for cessationism flow in a linear fashion.

³⁴As we shall see, it is, in fact, the tack of many of today’s “open but cautious” continuationists to find a new biblical basis for tongues. More and more regularly, defenses of continuationism appeal not *backward* to the apostolic period, but *forward* to the eschaton, which is making rearward inroads into the present. This represents an important shift in the continuationist argument that demands a correlate shift in the cessationist defense. See below.

strongly against the continuation of all forms of special revelation (including tongues). The significance of Christ's direct appointment of apostles and his literal, physical interaction with them is related directly to the prerogative to receive and transmit divine revelation. The privilege of bearing authoritative witness to Christ is restricted explicitly to those who had been with Christ from the beginning, were eyewitnesses of Christ's earthly ministry, and who had been commissioned by him (Luke 1:2; John 15:26–27; Acts 10:39–41; 1 John 1:1–3). Direct, divine revelation in the early church was always channeled through *apostles*, either directly or by apostolic influence.

In summary, fidelity to the scriptural conception of apostleship, together with the necessary conclusion therefrom that the apostolic office is no longer active, casts a shadow of suspicion over all historical appeals to NT practice for the continuation of tongues.

The Argument from the Purpose of Tongues as Attesting New Revelation

The purpose of miraculous capacities in the early church was not limited to the attestation of divine messengers, but also included the attestation of their revelatory message (Heb 2:4). This is not to suggest that miracles were never expressions of divine compassion or that tongues never had a didactic function (see, e.g., Acts 2:5–12), but, as Saucy notes, “the *primary purpose* of the miracles was as signs of authentication pointing to God, his messengers or spokesmen, and their message, which was the word of God.”³⁵ This seems to be the reason that the term “sign” (σημεῖον) is regularly used to denote tongues. A sign, by definition, is an “indication or confirmation of intervention by transcendent powers.”³⁶ Attention here is on the subordination of the sign to that which it signifies—viz., that God is breaking into the natural order to disclose himself in some way.

Paul makes this point clearly in 1 Corinthians 14 when he notes that the edifying value of tongues is lost unless the tongues either attend or contain prophecy for the church. He writes, “If I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?” (1 Cor 14:6). In short, he regards the existence of signs apart from prophecy (that to which the sign points) as a profitless distraction. And while Paul admittedly allows for the interpretation of tongues to

³⁵Robert L. Saucy, “Open but Cautious,” p. 106. Saucy goes on to observe that tongues are not employed in the book of Acts to attest *teachers*, but only *prophets*, that is, those who served as direct spokesmen for God as the “first witnesses” of Christ (p. 109).

³⁶BDAG, s.v. “σημεῖον,” p. 920.

supply the necessary prophecy, he notes that this is abnormal in the church—tongues are *normally* means of assuaging skeptics (14:22), not conduits for revelation.

Peter echoes this sentiment when he describes the “prophetic word [i.e., Scripture] made more sure” by virtue of the miracle of transfiguration (2 Pet 1:19–20). Commentators are divided whether the verse is describing Scripture as “more sure” *than* the miracle of the Transfiguration, or as “more sure” *because of* the miracle of the Transfiguration. In either case, however, our point is made: the role of miracles is subordinate in function to the inscripturated Word. Once that inscripturated Word has been sufficiently attested, the major function of miracles and tongues disappears.

It is here that my greatest concern with tongues comes to the fore. If the foregoing is true, then the continuance of tongues implies either (1) that Scripture is a source of revelation that is inadequately attested or (2) that Scripture is a source of revelation that is insufficient for the needs of the present dispensation (violating the spirit of such texts as 2 Timothy 3:17 and 2 Peter 1:3–4). At best this understanding threatens Scripture’s unique authority and causes people to neglect Scripture in favor of other, more direct sources of instruction and guidance, and at worst it opens up the faith to an unbounded host of non-orthodox additions and emendations.³⁷ It is difficult to see how the continuation of tongues and prophecy can coexist with the doctrine of biblical sufficiency, and even with the first-order doctrine of *sola scriptura*. And if church history tells us anything, it tells us that the denial of *sola scriptura* has functioned time and again as the threshold for heterodoxy in the development of the Christian church.

³⁷I would be remiss at this point to ignore the protests of conservative continuationists, many of whom cling tenaciously to the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible. Wayne Grudem, for instance, argues that the allowance of miraculous gifts in the church today need not conflict with “a strong affirmation of the closing of the New Testament canon (so that no new words of equal authority are given today), of the sufficiency of Scripture, and of the supremacy and unique authority of the Bible in guidance” (*Gift of Prophecy*, p. 18). These doctrines may be maintained by a continuationist, he affirms, if we recognize that, unlike OT prophecies, “prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority but was simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone’s mind.” By thus assigning fallibility to modern-day revelations, prophecies, and by extension tongues, Grudem ostensibly safeguards the priority of the biblical record.

To me this explanation creates a great number of problems (e.g., an inexplicable dichotomy between OT and NT prophecy; renegade, non-authoritative, private revelations that are divine in origin, but which are also unverifiable and potentially untrue; etc.) and solves none. Grudem’s protests notwithstanding, it seems impossible to integrate Grudem’s continuationism with his affirmation that “Scripture contains all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 127). For a thorough rebuttal of Grudem see Waldron, *To Be Continued?* pp. 61–79; F. David Farnell, “Fallible New Testament Prophecy/Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem’s Hypothesis,” *TMSJ* 2 (Fall 1991): 157–81.

The Argument from the Purpose of Tongues as Kingdom Markers

In Hebrews 6:5 we discover that the miracles performed by our Lord and by the early church described as the “powers of the age to come.” Dispensationalists have long used this text as decisive in arguing for cessationism—tongues are not for this age, but for the kingdom age, and so we should expect them to be suspended after Christ’s kingdom offer has been rescinded and the kingdom program has been properly adjusted to the present NT arrangement.

I believe this is still a sound argument. However, the widespread popularity of “realized eschatology” that swept through Christianity at large in the 1930s, overtook evangelicalism in the 1950s, and finally penetrated dispensational theology in the 1980s and 1990s, has tended to overturn this argument. As we noted earlier, the newest arguments for continuationism are much less rearward in focus, and correspondingly more forward-looking: tongues are not a lingering expression of an ancient church practice, but an anticipatory expression of eschatological hope. Seizing on the apparent fulfillment language of Acts 2:16–21 with reference to Joel 2:28–32, these argue (1) that the prophecy of tongues in Joel 2 is clearly eschatological in nature, (2) that its fulfillment began in Acts 2, and finally (3) that we should expect this eschatological practice to continue and even to expand in the life of the church as it approaches the end of the age. Many, in fact, seem to regard the eschatological argument for continuationism as unassailable.³⁸ The following syllogism, adapted from Douglas Moo’s similar syllogism with reference to healing, has direct implications for the issue of tongues and prophecy:

- A: Where the kingdom of God is present, tongues and prophecy are present.
- B: The kingdom of God is present in and through the church in our day.
- C: Therefore tongues and prophecy must be present in and through the church today.³⁹

Moo goes on to qualify the conclusion to say that “the presence of the reign of God in and through the church makes miracles of healing *possible*, but not *necessary*,” noting that the latter understanding smacks of

³⁸See, e.g., Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 822–26; Craig Keener, *Gift and Giver*, pp. 52–57, 96–98; Douglas A. Oss, “The Pentecostal/ Charismatic View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* 266–73; Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit: Discovering How God Speaks and Heals Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 224–25; Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), p. 255.

³⁹Douglas J. Moo, “Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel,” *TrinJ* 9 (Fall 1988): 197.

an “over-realized eschatology” that sees the kingdom present in all of its fullness. Moo concludes that “biblical balance is best preserved if Christians remain open to the exercise of miraculous healings but do not insist on them.”⁴⁰

Looking objectively at this syllogism, I find the logic impeccable—*if the major and minor premises are in fact valid*. And it is not surprising that progressive dispensationalists, who have embraced not only the major premise (A), but also (at least in part) the minor premise (B), have begun to cautiously embrace more open views on tongues—there remains little in their system to preclude this.⁴¹ But traditional dispensationalism, which holds to a postponed kingdom and thus rejects minor premise (B), is able to deny the conclusion and argue positively for cessationism. In fact, one might go so far as to argue that traditional dispensationalism *alone* can successfully argue for cessationism.⁴² Not all, of course, are thus inclined. Robert Saucy (a progressive dispensationalist), for instance, denies that inaugurated eschatology demands tongues, arguing that while the church enjoys some of the spiritual/redemptive benefits of kingdom life, the full manifestation of the physical/empowering benefits of kingdom life remain future.⁴³ Richard B. Gaffin (a non-dispensationalist) argues that tongues belong properly to redemptive history and not church history, noting that the “waiting” church does not have all of the kingdom benefits promised to the eschatological community of the redeemed.⁴⁴ But while these attempts to maintain a cessationist position are noteworthy, they seem to reflect a bit of arbitrariness in application that is difficult to maintain. I am convinced that by far the most ironclad defense of cessationism lies in the hands of the traditional dispensationalist who sees tongues as expressions of powers of a kingdom in abeyance, as markers of an age still to come (Heb 6:5).

The scope of this paper does not permit a full defense of the traditional dispensational view of the kingdom. This has been effectively

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 197–98.

⁴¹See, e.g., Ryrie’s prediction of this in his *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 177; also Bruce A. Baker, “Progressive Dispensationalism & Cessationism: Why They Are Incompatible,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 8 (Spring 2004): 55–88.

⁴²Moo makes this very point in his article, albeit in a somewhat backhanded way. He notes that [traditional] dispensationalists “should not necessarily expect divine healing in our day because the kingdom is not, in fact present.” Moo dismisses this view, however, as out of step with the evangelical consensus that the kingdom has been inaugurated, and concludes, “The kingdom is indeed present in our day, and we should expect to see signs of that kingdom” (Moo, “Divine Healing,” p. 197).

⁴³“An Open but Cautious Response to Douglas A. Oss,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* pp. 302–4.

⁴⁴“A Cessationist Response to Douglas A. Oss,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* pp. 285ff.

accomplished elsewhere.⁴⁵ But it does seem relevant to at least answer the specific question of the use of Joel 2 in Acts 2. At first blush Luke does seem to be suggesting that Joel's kingdom promises are being fulfilled as the newly inaugurated kingdom begins to blossom: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16, KJV). And in continuationist literature, this is regularly assumed to be true without argument. However, as we begin to compare Acts 2 with Joel 2, an astonishing discovery emerges, viz., that *none* of the details of Joel's prophecy find fulfillment in Acts 2: (1) the events in Acts do not take place "after the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord"; (2) the Spirit is not poured out on all mankind; (3) dreams and visions do not occur in Acts 2, and there is no clear indication that prophecy occurs either; (4) blood, fire, columns of smoke do not make an appearance, and (5) the concealment of the great luminaries does not occur. In fact, the one miracle that we *do* find in Acts 2—tongues—is ironically *not* predicted in Joel.⁴⁶ As such, we have a great hermeneutical conundrum on our hands. Several options emerge:

- Some, particularly of the more covenantal persuasion suggest that Peter has simply recast Joel's prophecy and that the prophecy is fulfilled in its entirety at Pentecost.⁴⁷
- Some suggest that Peter is employing a combination of *peser* techniques and "advance typology" to supply "eschatological application to a present situation" by the "use of text alteration or wordplay by a divinely inspired figure."⁴⁸
- Some suggest that Peter sees Joel's prophecy as having an extended fulfillment or multiple fulfillments such that the fulfillment has begun, but awaits completion.⁴⁹

⁴⁵I recommend Alva J. McClain's *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1959) as the best exemplar here. While McClain's view of the kingdom differs (sometimes significantly) from the understanding that emerged from the Dallas school of theology (e.g., titles by Chafer, Walvoord, and Pentecost), they resonate together in placing the Messianic kingdom in the future. The mystery "form" of the kingdom advocated by the latter group is not to be confused with the already/not yet understanding of the progressive dispensationalist view of the Messianic kingdom.

⁴⁶In Roy Beacham's excellent summary of this passage, he concludes sagely the "time, substance, and referents" of the fulfillment are all wrong—nothing matches! ("The Analogical Use of Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:15–21: A Literal Approach," in *The Holy Spirit: Bible Faculty Leadership Summit* [Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998], pp. 109–10).

⁴⁷E.g., John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 73.

⁴⁸E.g., Daniel J. Treier, "The Fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32: A Multiple Lens Approach," *JETS* 40 (March 1997): 18.

⁴⁹E.g., Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 112ff; Walter C. Kaiser, *Back to the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p. 43.

- Some suggest that Peter was simply speaking analogically, that is, suggesting a point of similarity between the events predicted in Joel 2 and the events occurring in Acts 2—viz., the supernatural outpouring of pneumatological powers. In this case there is no fulfillment at all, only a point of similarity.⁵⁰

I am convinced that fidelity to the plain, unalterable, and infallible text of the OT makes the first two options not only implausible, but incompatible with inerrancy. The third *might* be plausible if only there were at least one piece of the Joel prophecy actually fulfilled in Acts 2. In view of the fact that this is not the case, I am convinced that the analogical understanding of Peter's language is to be preferred. In this case, the exercise of tongues in Acts 2 is not to be associated with the *arrival* of the kingdom, but is, instead, a kingdom *marker*, that is, a signal of a shift in God's kingdom program that heretofore had been a mystery. As such, tongues in Acts functioned in the absence of the completed Word of God to confirm, specifically (but not exclusively) to the Jews, the viability of the dramatic change in how a believer is to rightly relate with God in view of the dissolution of sacrifices, the setting aside of the Law, the unfolding of God's new dispensational vehicle, the church, and the unlikely inclusion of Gentiles in that body. All these changes, which a Jew would naturally view with a skeptical eye, merited proof from God that they were, indeed, legitimate changes—proof that a shift in God's kingdom program had truly occurred. And this proof came, very often, in the form of glossolalia.

The Argument from the Biblical Function of the Tongues as Edifying the Church

The following is not so much an argument against tongues *per se*, but a collection of snipes at the practice of tongues in the broad church today. In short, they argue collectively that *if* speaking in tongues continues in the church today (which I grant only for sake of argument), most of what passes for glossolalia today does not fit the biblical criteria for tongues as set down in 1 Corinthians 12–14. Specifically, the following four expressions of “tongues” in the church today fail because they do not fulfill the primary function of spiritual gifts—the edification of the church.

Tongues as Incoherent, Inherently Meaningless Utterances

Great debate swirls over the identity of the use of γλῶσσα in the NT. Poythress reduces the options to the following five:

⁵⁰See, e.g., Beacham, “Use of Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:15–21”; Thomas D. Ice, “Dispensational Hermeneutics,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 41. For a helpful hermeneutical discussion of this use of fulfillment language in the NT, see Charles H. Dyer, “Biblical Meaning of ‘Fulfillment,’” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 57–69.

(a) a connected piece of a known human language, (b) a piece not identifiable as a known human language, but having language-like structures according to the criteria of modern linguistics; (c) a piece with fragments of known human languages, but with other unknown parts; (d) a piece without fragments from known human language, having linguistic deviations from patterns common to human languages, yet being indistinguishable by a naïve listener from a foreign language; (e) disconnected pieces, muttering, groaning, and other miscellaneous material easily distinguishable from normal human verbal utterance.⁵¹

The suggestion that $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$ was used by extrabiblical sources to reference an “utterance outside the normal patterns of intelligible speech” (option [e] above) is one raised in the standard Greek lexicon for the period.⁵² However, others have disputed this suggestion, demonstrating that ancient writers restricted their usage of the term $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$ to antiquated and foreign languages, preferring alternate terms to denote incoherent utterances.⁵³ Further, there are several demonstrable differences between the pagan practice and biblical practice,⁵⁴ the latter which is surely determinative here.

Turning then to the biblical record, we find the options significantly narrowed. Here, we find that all *clear* instances of $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$ (which in accord to the basic principle of the analogy of faith inform the unclear instances) unequivocally reference known languages.⁵⁵ In Acts 2, the definitive event to which all other glossolalia in Acts points (see, e.g., Acts 10:46; 11:15), the tongues were clearly human languages, because they were heard and understood by various foreigners.⁵⁶ Uses of the term (and its cognates) in 1 Corinthians 14:21, Revelation 5:9, and Revelation 7:9 also represent undisputed references to people speaking various languages. Additionally, the fact that Paul calls for the *interpretation* of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:13, 26–28 argues convincingly for objective and cognitive meaning, i.e., intrinsically propositional linguistic material that is subject to normal

⁵¹Vern Poythress, “The Nature of Corinthian Glossolalia: Possible Options,” *WTJ* 40 (Fall 1977): 132–33.

⁵²BDAG, s.v. “ $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$,” pp. 201–2.

⁵³Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 120–48.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*; also esp. T. M. Crone, *Early Christian Prophecy: A Study of its Origin and Function* (Baltimore: St. Mary’s University Press, 1973).

⁵⁵The only possible exceptions here are Isa 29:24 and 32:4 (LXX), where the term is used to reference stammering speech.

⁵⁶Cyril G. Williams’s suggestion that the charge of drunkenness precludes the possibility that these were human languages (*Tongues of the Spirit: A Study of Pentecostal Glossolalia and Related Phenomena* [Cardiff: University of Wales press, 1981], pp. 31–32) is unconvincing. The text clearly says that what was spoken were the birth languages of specific people groups (Acts 2:6, 8, 10). The charge of drunkenness undoubtedly arose from those who could not discern one or more of the languages and thus deduced incorrectly that they were drunken gibberish.

translation procedures.⁵⁷ Finally, as if in anticipation of the modern practice of tongues, Paul announces clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:10 that every valid instance of tongues contains intrinsic, propositional meaning—a meaning that must be divulged if it is to be permitted in the church: “There are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning” (NIV).

That the tongues mentioned are “in the world” suggests further that these are ordinary human languages. While Paul speaks of a language known only to God (1 Cor 14:2), it is unlikely that this references a “divine” language that is *untranslatable*, but rather an ordinary language that is *untranslated*, and thus illegitimate in the assembly. Paul’s mention of a language of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1 could possibly suggest a language *unique* to angels, but it is more likely that he was using hyperbole to reference a hypothetical use of tongues that exceeded even the claims of the Corinthians—yet still fell short of the greater virtue of love.⁵⁸

In any case, what emerges with some clarity is the understanding that tongues are coherent, contain intrinsically propositional meaning, and can be translated by normal linguistic conventions. Any proposed expression of tongues that falls short of these criteria does not qualify as a biblical expression of tongues.

Tongues Practiced Without an Interpreter

In keeping with the foregoing, Paul is insistent that tongues must be practiced sparingly, one at a time, and only with an interpreter (esp. 1 Cor 14:26–28). His reasoning is clear—anything else cannot edify because it creates chaos and bewilderment in the meeting of God’s church (14:23, 33). And it is here that we find the guiding thread for the whole of Paul’s message in 1 Corinthians 14. Any practice that takes place in the house of God must edify the *assembly* or else it must be eliminated (vv. 4, 5, 12, 17, 19, 26). Clearly all modern-day

⁵⁷Anthony Thiselton’s suggestion that the term ἐρμηνεύω might possibly mean to “put into words” (“The ‘Interpretation’ of Tongues: A New Suggestion in the Light of Greek Usage in Philo and Josephus,” *JTS* 30 [April 1979]:15–36) is rendered unconvincing by the fact that the original utterances in 1 Corinthians 12–14 already took the form of spoken words, not just thoughts or “precognitive mumblings” (Max Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” *Vox Evangelica* 15 [1985]: 18–20; so also Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 81). Equally unconvincing is the suggestion offered by D. A. Carson and Vern Poythress that the term ἐρμηνεύω might be used to describe a kind of deciphering of encrypted codes through a supernaturally supplied “key” (Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 84–88; Poythress, “Linguistic and Sociological Analyses of Modern Tongues-Speaking: Their Contributions and Limitations,” *WTJ* 42 [Spring 1980]: 374–77). While both Poythress and Carson are to be commended for their insistence that tongues contain intrinsic, coherent meaning, the suggestion of secret encryptions has no historical basis, and appears to me to reflect a bit of psychological speculation in an effort to equate the disparate phenomena of NT tongues and modern “tongues.”

⁵⁸So Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 68.

expressions of tongues that do not include orderliness, translation, and careful explanation in the assembly are categorically unbiblical.⁵⁹

Tongues Foisted upon the Whole Congregation.

It has been mentioned that most conservative expressions of tongues no longer demand tongues of all believers as proof of conversion. Nonetheless, there remain many expressions of modern-day tongues-speaking that demand glossolalia of all believers as necessary expressions of saving faith or of Spirit baptism. Against these Paul clearly affirms that “all do not speak with tongues” (1 Cor 12:30). Any practice of glossolalia that requires tongues-speaking of all believers under pain of the lost assurance comes perilously close to being another gospel.

Tongues Practiced Privately

In the midst of his diatribe against the non-edifying nature of untranslated tongues, Paul on several occasions seems to suggest that tongues that are of no use in the assembly may yet edify the speaker (1 Cor 14:4, 14, 28) and be used to communicate with God himself (14:2, 14, 28). These curious comments have led many continuationists to argue for a private, devotional use of tongues outside of the assembly—one that is not edifying to the body, but edifying nonetheless to the individual and to God. However, this understanding misses the force of Paul’s argument, for two reasons.

First, Paul’s argument, as we have seen, is that the function of tongues in the church, like all gifts, is the *mutual* advancement and edification of the body, and not the advancement of self. Taken this way, Paul’s comment that non-interpreted tongues edify only the speaker (14:4) emerges not as a virtue, but as a vice: it is an instance of self-aggrandizement that meets with Paul’s disapproval and should be eschewed.⁶⁰

Second, Paul’s statement that uninterpreted tongues speak only to God (14:2) and his subsequent directive to speak [in tongues?] to oneself and to God (14:28) are not to be construed as a positive statements about tongues. Again, Paul’s concern is the mutual edification of the body, which is not furthered by untranslated tongues. He thus instructs tongue-speakers to be quiet and to engage in private

⁵⁹We might also add that the incidence of a translation, while necessary to the legitimate use of tongues, falls short of a guarantee of legitimacy. D. A. Carson offers the illustration of a colleague who “rather cheekily” quoted a portion of John 1 in Greek at a charismatic church service, and solicited an immediate “interpretation” that had nothing at all to do with John’s words (Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 87). As Carson goes on to note, this “is not comprehensive enough to serve as a universally damning indictment”; nonetheless, he is obliged to concede that this fabrication of interpretations is “frequent” (pp. 87–88).

⁶⁰Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 89; also Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 170–71. For a similar negative usage of οἰκοδομέω see 1 Cor 8:10.

communion with God. This final injunction could be taken two ways: (1) Continuationists generally suggest that Paul is commending a private usage of tongues as a positive *alternative* to speaking publically in untranslated tongues in the assembly. But in view of the nature of tongues, this seems unlikely. How, indeed, can a believer be edified and God glorified by the sustained iteration of words whose meaning is lost to the speaker? In the absence of any sensible answer to this question, it would seem that Paul's positive commendation of tongues (if such it is) is sarcastic.⁶¹ We might paraphrase Paul, thus, as saying something like this: "If there is no interpreter, then be quiet, but if you can't shut up, go far, far away and chatter in seclusion, somewhere where you will not be a distraction to the assembly." (2) Perhaps a better understanding, offered by Robert L. Thomas, is that the $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ that punctuates the verse is not adversative (i.e., giving an alternative course of action) but explanatory (i.e., detailing the person's silent response within the assembly).⁶² As such we might paraphrase Paul as saying something like this: "If there is no interpreter, then be quiet, and engage in silent communion with God." One might possibly conclude from Paul's comments that the believer is to silently commune with God *in tongues* (a form of "thinking in tongues"), but this is an inference from silence, and as the foregoing has shown, a poor one. Paul simply tells his readers to be silent and commune to God, commending neither private speaking in tongues nor thinking in tongues.

To summarize this section, then, even if we concede for sake of argument that the practice of tongues-speaking has a valid expression in the church, virtually none of what passes as tongues-speaking in the church at large passes the muster of biblical scrutiny.

CONCLUSION

While the case for cessationism, I believe has been objectively made for decades, the continually changing landscape of evangelical, dispensational, and even fundamentalist theology is such that the case needs to be made again and again to meet new challenges and emphases in the theology and practice of continuationism. And while there is a significant trend in conservative evangelicalism to dismiss differences on this issue as non-essential in nature, the foregoing has attempted to stress that this issue is one with first-order doctrinal implications. May God give us grace to defend cessationism as having crucial implications for "the faith once delivered" (Jude 3–4).

⁶¹So Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, p. 177.

⁶²*Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 254, n. 24.